TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SB 207

Insurance Auto Auctions, Inc.

BUSINESS & LABOR

EXHIBIT NO. \$7

DATE 1-20-09

BILL NO. 58207

January 20, 2009

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Committee Members,

My name is Erik Walden. I am the Area Manager for Insurance Auto Auctions, Inc. With me today is Brent Wundrow, who supervises our operations in Billings and Missoula. We are here today to speak in opposition to SB 207.

IAA was founded in 1982. We arrange for the sale of total-loss vehicles acquired by insurance companies though the settlement of claims. More specifically, we pick up and store vehicles, facilitate the transfer of sale documents, and auction salvage vehicles for our clients. IAA does business in 48 states. In Montana, we have the two facilities that Brent is responsible for, one in Billings and one in Missoula.

As I understand it, the only purpose for this bill is to lower the price of total-loss vehicles for the benefit of auto salvage yards in Montana. The bill would accomplish this goal by creating a licensing requirement for buyers. In our business this is called "bid card" legislation. This bill goes beyond other bid card statutes by creating a monetary disincentive for out-of-state buyers who would not be eligible to recover the tax credit proposed for in-state applicants.

SB 207 would hurt our business. We depend on commissions from the sale of total-loss vehicles acquired by insurance companies that settle claims from their customers. Presently, about 65% of the vehicle sales arranged by IAA are to in-state buyers. Of the 35% sold out-of-state, about 3% are to foreign buyers. The immediate and predictable effect of this bill would be to eliminate thousands of potential internet buyers who might bid on vehicles from Montana, but will not apply for a license to do so. Less competition from buyers means lower prices, resulting in smaller commissions.

SB 207 will also hurt Montana insurers by reducing the amount of money that is recovered from the sale of total-loss vehicles acquired by insurance companies through the settlement of claims. Ultimately, this may put upward pressure on insurance rates, which is bad for all Montana residents.

In addition, though no fiscal note is available, it seems likely Montana residents will be asked to pay for an expensive new government licensing program at a time when state revenue is shrinking. So, the proponents of this bill are asking the government to spend scarce tax dollars to create an unnecessary, anti-competitive government licensing program intended to reduce free-market competition at the expense of my company and others located and doing business in Montana. This bill should not be enacted.

When you take the time to understand the nature of the used auto parts business you will see that this is not only unfair, it takes Montana in the wrong direction in a business that is increasingly dependent on the internet.

Most of the total loss vehicles we sell go to used part dealers. The proponents of this bill are in the business of selling used auto parts. Virtually all of them sell parts on the internet. Each of the first three Montana based auto salvage yards that I checked offer used parts to internet buyers and I have attached copies from their web pages.

Just as the sale of parts has moved to the internet, the sale of salvage vehicles has moved to the internet. As a result, auto auctions have transformed from a live sales, where buyers show up in person, to a virtual sale, where buyers log on remotely. This has increased competition and makes it almost impossible for states to administer and enforce bid card requirements. There is simply no easy way to confirm that a buyer is one of the two designated buyers called for in SB 207.

In recognition of changes in the auto auction industry, a number of states have or soon will repeal bid card requirements. Since 2007 Illinois (Public Act 95-0783), Louisiana (Act No. 257), Oklahoma (SB NO. 577) and Missouri (SB 82) have all repealed bid card requirements. This year other states including Utah are considering bills to do the same.

In summary, IAA is asking you to vote against this bill. The Legislature should not spend general funds on a licensing program that is designed to provide an unfair competitive advantage to few businesses at the expense of our business.

Erik Walden, Area Manager Insurance Auto Auctions

10131 Garrymore Lane

Enk Wale

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(406) 542-3442



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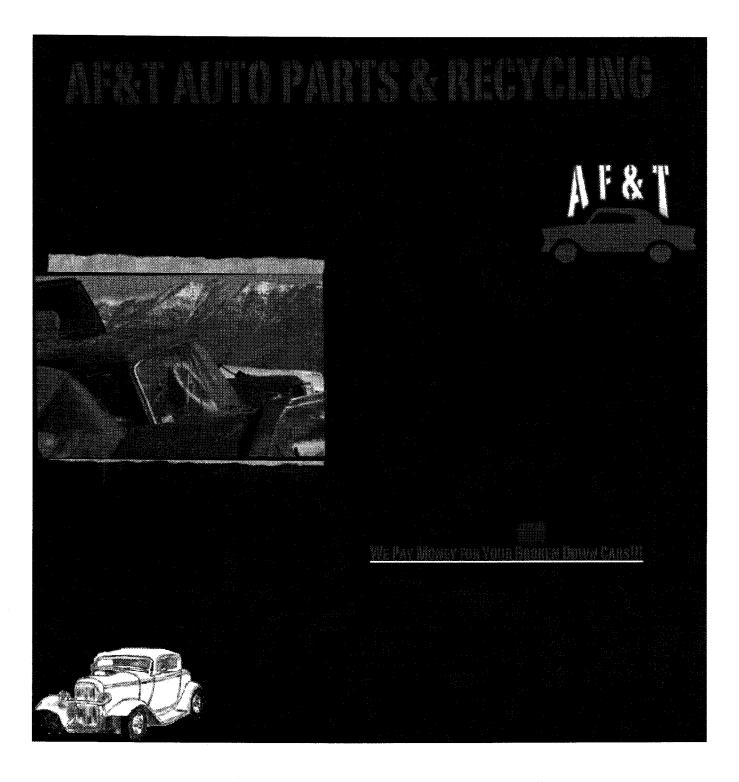
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